

# historic yukon



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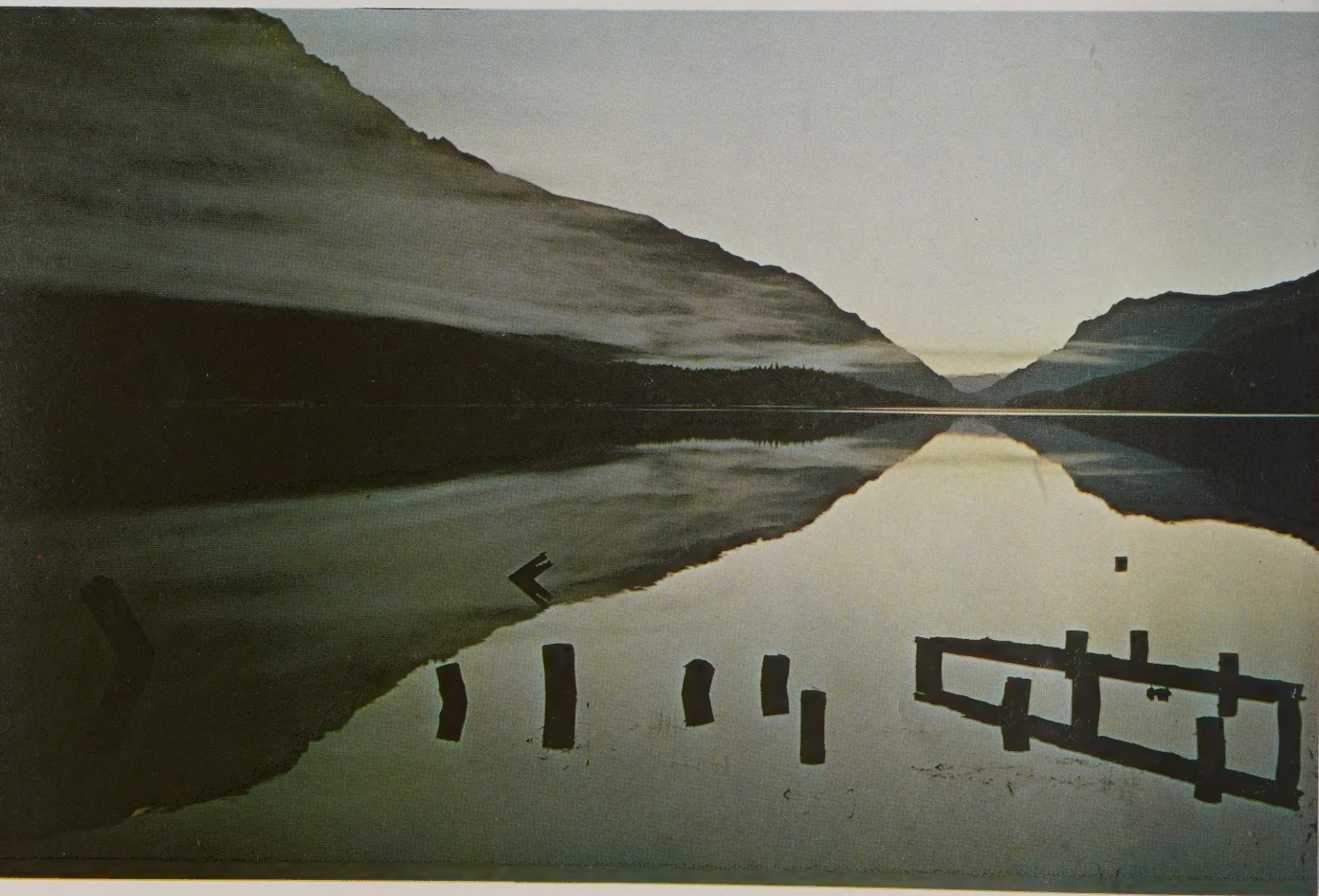
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# early discoveries . . .

It wasn't until 1825 that the first explorer — Sir John Franklin, in search of the North West passage — set foot in what today is part of the Yukon Territory. Thus, the modern history of this northern land began. Franklin reached Herschel Island, the northernmost tip of Yukon, in July of 1825. He heard from the Eskimos there that white men far to the west (Russians in Alaska) were trading for furs. He took this news back to the factors of the Hudson's Bay Company who renewed their exploration of this vast unknown wilderness. In 1847 a trading post was established at Fort Yukon on the Yukon River, four miles above the Porcupine River, an area that became part of Alaska when the boundary between Canadian and U.S. territory was finally drawn.

The fur traders were the first to come, but not far behind were the gold seekers. Although the Hudson's Bay Company frowned on its people prospecting the creeks, because essentially they were fur traders, they were the first to report traces of gold. In 1863 a church of England missionary, Rev. Robert McDonald, reported how he took gold dust out of Birch Creek in the Yukon watershed by the spoonful and soon prospectors were trickling into the Territory. By 1872 traces of gold were being found all over Yukon — but the big strike, the bonanza, was still to be found.





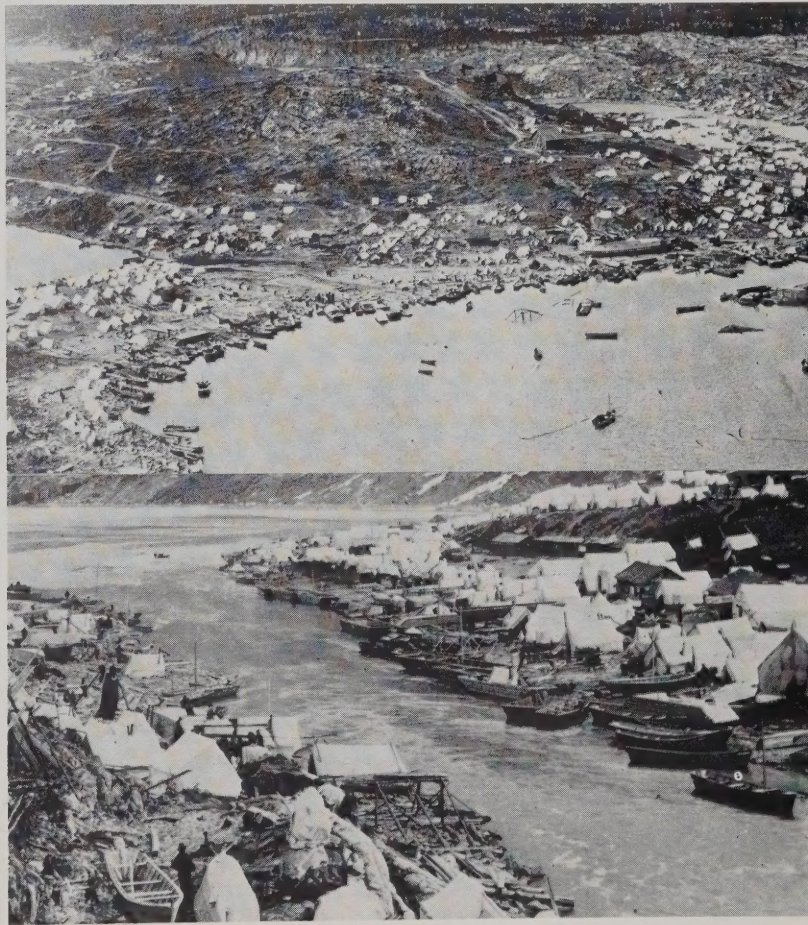
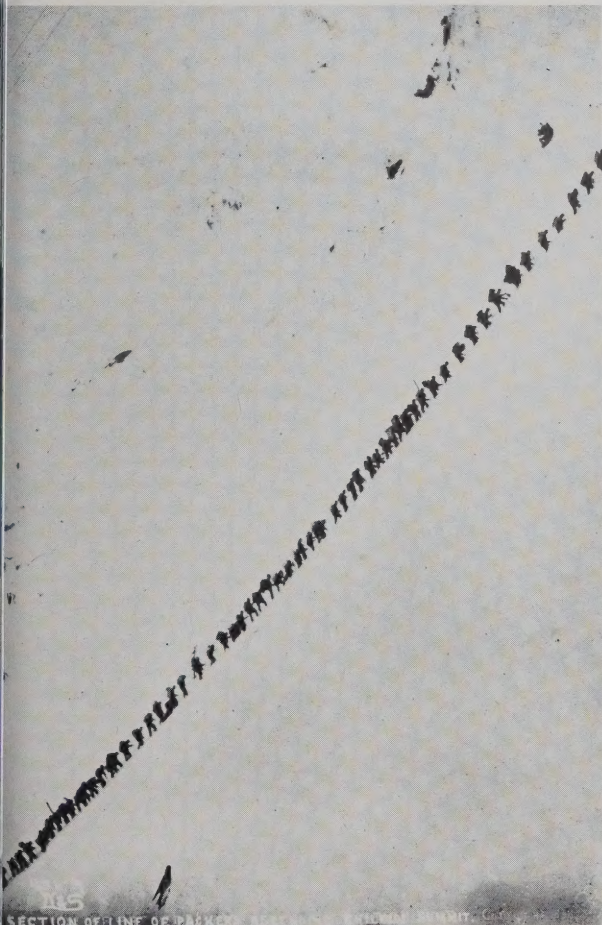
# the trail of '98

old! The cry that changed the destiny of Yukon. It was first heard in the Canadian Klondike in August of 1896, and by the rest of the world a year later. It was a cry that triggered the most famous gold rush in the history of mankind — a rush that saw an estimated 100,000 men set out for Yukon.

The trails to the Klondike were among the most primitive and arduous ever seen. To this day the feats and exploits of some of those who came north along these trails rank high in the annals of courage, grim determination and stamina.

Two of the toughest routes were overland, one through interior British Columbia and the other from Edmonton, Alberta. In the spring of 1898 more than 1,500 men and 3,000 horses set out for the Klondike from Ashcroft in southern B.C. Only six men and none of the horses reached the gold fields.

Of all the routes to the Klondike, the overland route from Edmonton was the most arduous. To this day no accurate record has been found to indicate how many men actually made it. The highest estimate is 200 but nearly all historians agree that most of these reached the Klondike after the gold rush was over.



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opposite page: upper left — George W. Carmack  
upper right — Robert Henderson  
lower left — Skookum Jim  
lower right — Tagish Charley

The only practical route to Yukon was up the coast to Skagway, Alaska, and through two passes in the Coast mountain range to Bennett, B.C., at the head waters of the Yukon River on Lake Bennett. It is this route — through the Chilkoot Pass or the White Pass — that has come to be known as the Trail of '98. Despite conditions that made it one of history's great ordeals, some 40,000 men made it to the Klondike between the summers of 1897 and 1898. Even today, the famous Chilkoot Trail is still passable and the more adventurous tourists hike from Dyea, near Skagway to Bennett, a distance of some 35 miles. Other visitors ride through

the White Pass in the comfort of a narrow gauge passenger train. Along the way they can see relics of the past that are silent reminders of that stampede of gold hungry men.

Although Bennett is in British Columbia, it nevertheless is part of Yukon gold rush history. For it was here that the men built the boats that took them down the Yukon River to the goldfields in the spring of '98. It was from here they looked north and saw the strange beauty of the land that for a few held hope and riches and for others, frustration and despair.

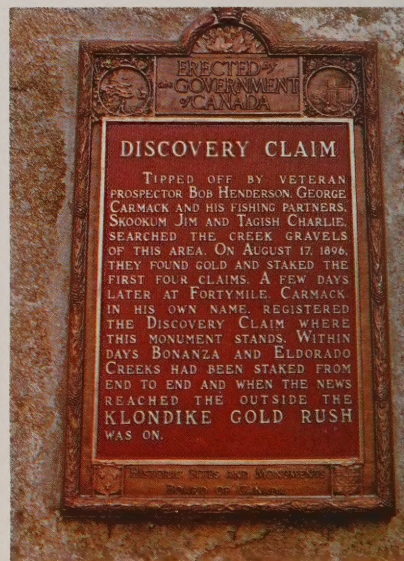
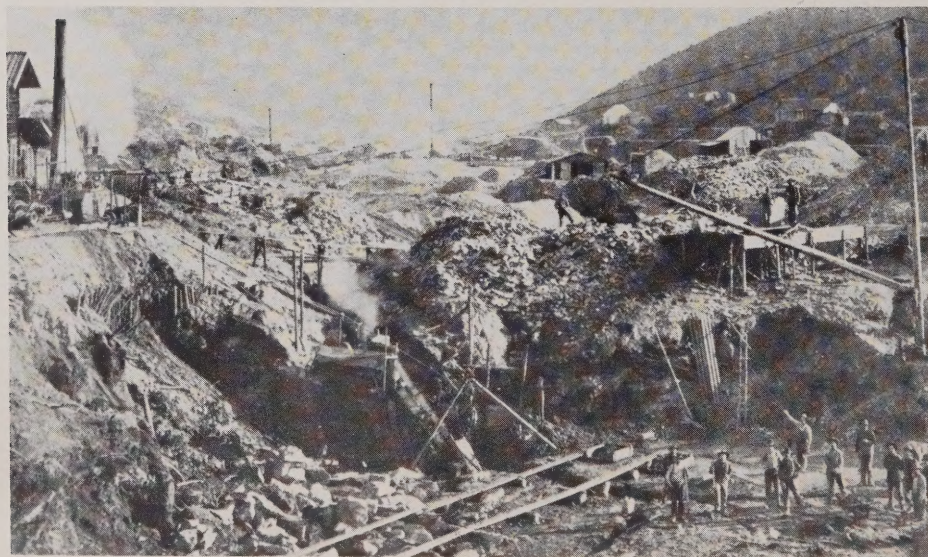




# klondike

To the Indians it was known as the Thronduik river — meaning “hammer water”. To the prospector it came to be known as the Klondike River. Not far from where the Klondike meets the Yukon River, Rabbit Creek flowed into the Klondike. It was on this stream, on August 17, 1896, that George Washington Carmack, and his two Indian brothers-in-law — Tagish Charley and Skookum Jim — staked the claim that set off the Klondike Gold Rush. Almost immediately Rabbit Creek became known as Bonanza Creek and to this day carries this historic name.

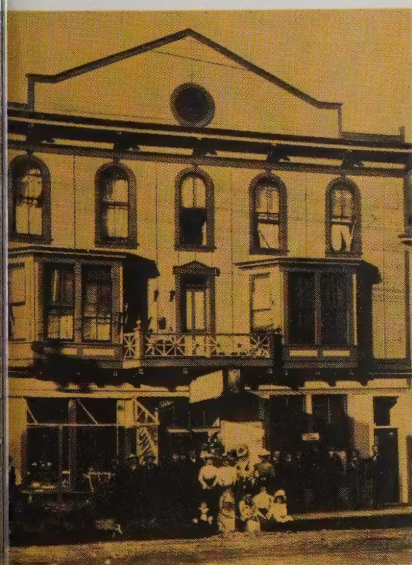
Although Carmack and the two Indians staked the original claims on Bonanza Creek, they had been told there might be gold there by another prospector — Robert Henderson — who asked them to let him know when they found it. As history has recorded, Carmack, Tagish Charley, and Skookum Jim didn't tell Henderson who missed out on the Bonanza Creek claims. He did however, go on to stake a claim on nearby Hunker Creek but fate again turned against him and he never did make his fortune.





Because he was in ill health and unable to do the necessary representation work on his Hunker claim, Henderson was forced to sell it for \$3,000 to another miner who made more than half a million dollars out of it. Broken in health and in spirit, Henderson moved to Vancouver where he lived out his years on a government pension.

Probably the strangest sight along the creeks is the tailing piles, the remnants of a gold mining operation that started after the initial rush and continued until 1966, when the last commercial dredge closed down. In that period some 300 million dollars worth of gold was taken out of the creeks and today, even though the big mining companies are gone, individual miners still work small sluicing operations.





# city of gold

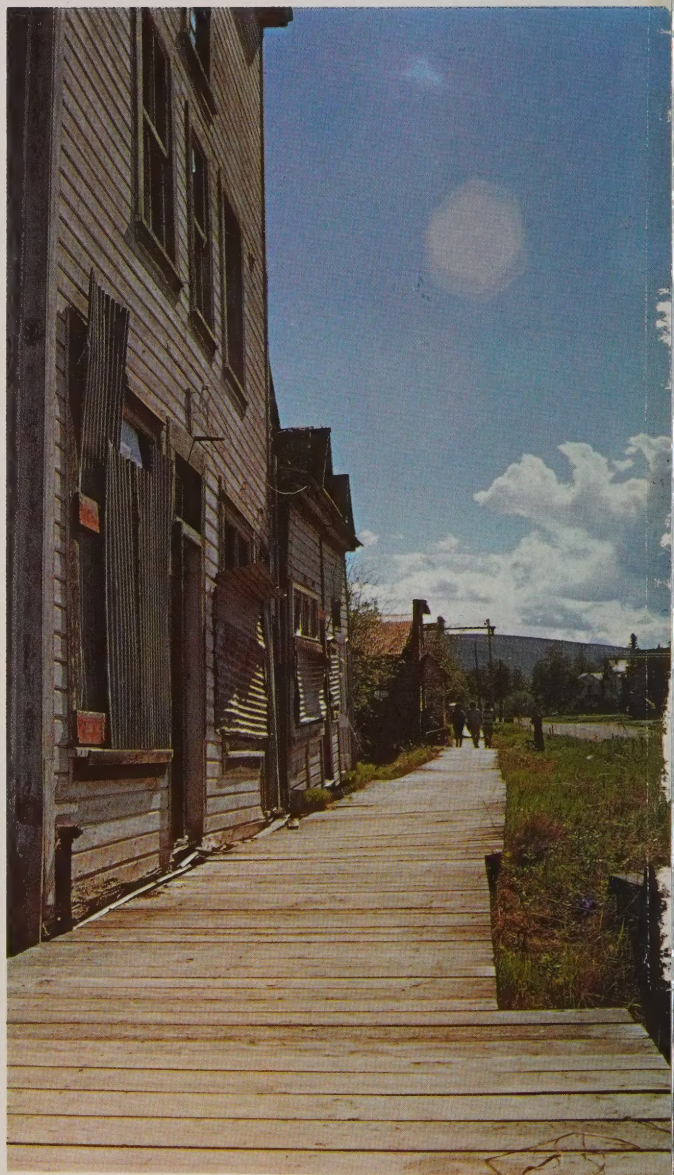
The rich, bawdy, gold rush city of Dawson — once the largest settlement north of San Francisco and west of Winnipeg. It lies nestled in the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike rivers.

This active community's tourist industry makes it a vital part of the Territory. Memories and ghosts inhabit its old buildings and it's hard to walk the boardwalks without feeling their presence.

In time, much of what's left of the historic part of Dawson will be restored, while some of it may be preserved as it stands today. Dawson may never again see the full measure of the glory it enjoyed at the height of the Gold Rush when it had a population of 40,000 but it will always be a living monument to the fact that this glory did exist.

Today, in summer, strains of honky-tonk music can be heard coming from the Palace Grand Theatre while the sound of roulette wheels can be heard a little further down the street at Diamond Tooth Gertie's Gambling Hall. This is the living past, the past the visitor can become a part of. At the same time on almost every street there is a silent old building, decrepit and leaning, to remind you of a dead past — a past that will never return.

People helped make Yukon's history and some of them were the most colorful characters of their era. The Klondike attracted



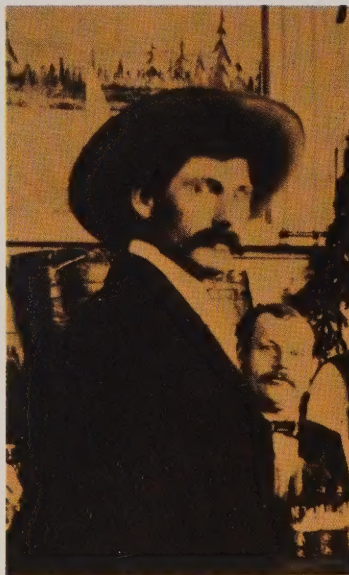




adventurers, entrepreneurs, showmen, and celebrities. It also created its own celebrities, such people as Klondike Kate, who came to Dawson as a dance hall girl and became the toast of the Klondike. Her real name was Kitty Rockwell, and for a few years she was the favorite of the gold rich Dawson society. She eventually left the Yukon and spent her declining years as the favorite subject of newspaper feature writers until her death in 1957.

Another colorful character of the Gold Rush era was Arizona Charlie Meadows, a veteran of the Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill Wild West Shows. He set out for the Klondike with a portable bar and hoped to arrive in Dawson a rich man by selling whiskey to the miners along the trail of '98. He lost his bar in a flood along the Chilkoot and was forced to resort to demonstrations of sharp shooting to make money. In Dawson he continued his show business activity by building and operating the Palace Grand Theatre, one of the first buildings that has been completely rebuilt in the Gold Rush City.

Many of those connected with the Gold Rush left when it ended. But some lived on in Yukon and three of the principle figures in the Discovery of Gold — Tagish Charley, Skookum Jim, and Kate Carmack, the Indian wife of George Carmack — all lie buried in a small cemetery 50 miles south of Whitehorse on the northern shore of Lake Bennett.





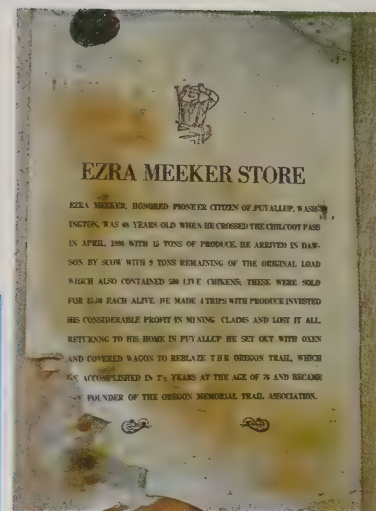
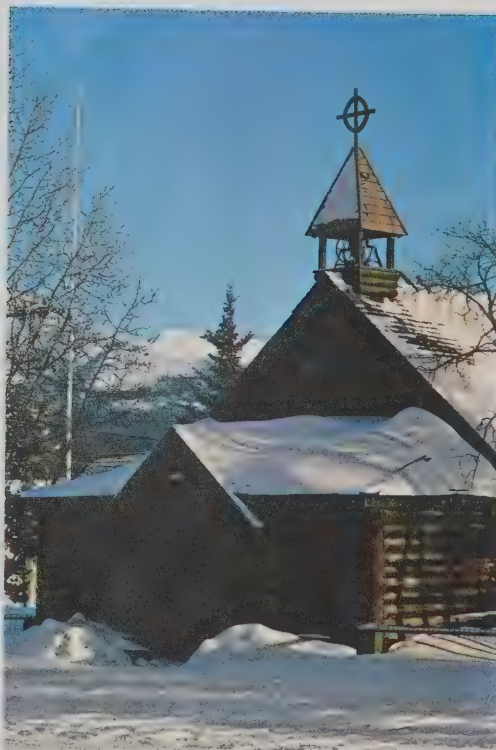
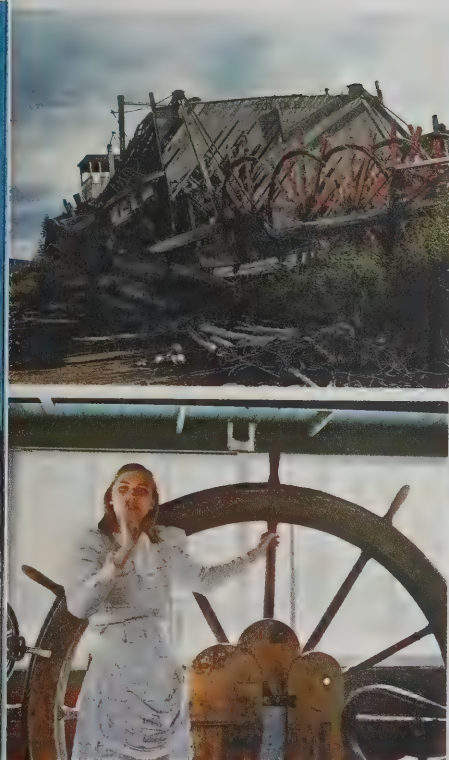
# whitehorse



Whitehorse, now the capital city of Yukon, was a stopping point on the route to the Klondike and it became the transportation centre for the mining operations that followed. Here the White Pass and Yukon Railway located its northern rail terminus and the city became a riverboat port to rival any on the Mississippi. The boats, from Dawson and other mining centres, used the Yukon river system to converge on Whitehorse with their cargos. During their hey-day, there were over 250 riverboats operating in Yukon.

When big trucks took over the job of hauling ore, the boats were sold or dismantled. In Whitehorse, the riverboat Klondike, has been restored as a museum piece, as has the Keno at Dawson City. The Tutshi at Carcross has been stabilized and two other vessels are sitting on the shore at Whitehorse. Other wrecks can be found throughout the river system with the most famous riverboat graveyard downstream and across the river from Dawson City.





History is represented in Whitehorse in other ways. Here you find the MacBride Museum with its fine collection from Yukon's past. There is also the Old Log Church Museum. It was built as an Anglican parish church in 1900 and had among its parishioners such famous Yukoners as Robert W. Service. It was for a church concert in 1904 that the famed poet composed the ballad of "Dangerous Dan McGrew" and then decided against reciting it because he felt it was too risqué. He went on to write other poems of Yukon and in 1908, when he moved to Dawson, they were published as "Songs of a Sourdough".



# points of interest

It would take a book much larger than this to list all the historic points of interest in Yukon, many of which are well off the highways and not readily accessible. But there are some that are not too hard to find.

Champagne is a small community on the Alaska Highway, about 54 miles northwest of Whitehorse. It's an old Northwest Mounted Police post and also a trading post. It was once a stopping point along the famed Dalton Trail. Today it has also become famous because of its Indian cemetery with its colorful Spirit Houses.

Dalton Post, where the Dalton Trail started, is about 53 miles down the Haines Road from Haines Junction and then another five miles along a primitive but passable trail. Here you find the remains of a post built in 1890 by Jack Dalton which served as a starting point for travellers to the Klondike and other gold fields in the Yukon.

Forty Mile is now a ghost town, but it played an important part in the Yukon's pre-Gold Rush history, as well as in the Gold Rush itself. It was here that the first claims on Bonanza Creek were registered and it was from here that the news of the discovery spread. You can't drive into Forty Mile, but it's only a four-mile hike from the Clinton Creek road along the bank of the Forty Mile River.





# since then

Transportation routes have always played an important part in Yukon's history. In the early days it was the Indian trails, fur trade routes and the trails leading to the gold fields. In more recent times it was the Alaska Highway and the most forgotten Canol pipeline road.

During the Second World War, in the spring of 1942, with the co-operation of the Canadian government, the United States Corps of Engineers began surveying for the building of a highway between Dawson Creek, British Columbia, and Fairbanks, Alaska. It was to stretch 1,523 miles through the northern wilderness and provide an important supply link with military bases in Alaska. It was to cut right through Yukon.

But, at the same time, a project rivalling the highway in scope was also started by the American army, with the help of private contrac-

tors. It was simply called the Canol Project — short for Canadian oil — and its objective was to build an oil pipeline from Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories to Whitehorse where an oil refinery was to be built.

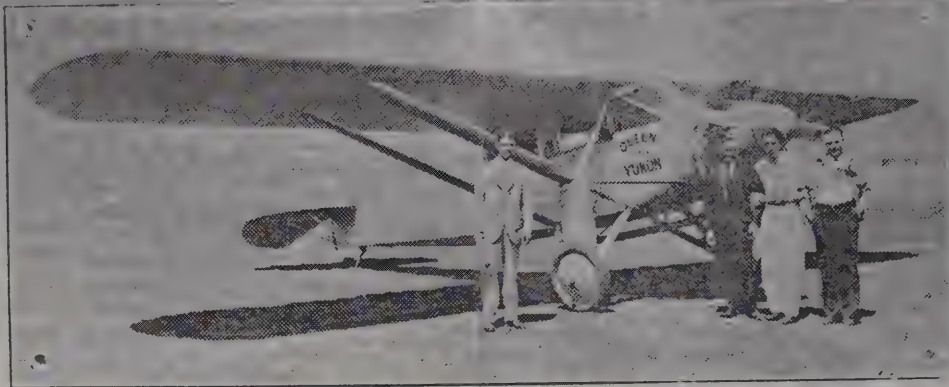
Incredibly, it took only about nine months to build the Alaska Highway, but it took the same army and thousands of civilian workers almost two years to build the pipeline and its network of supply roads. In the final analysis, the Canol project may have been even bigger than the highway project itself. In order to get supplies into Norman Wells and then build the pipeline into Whitehorse, the engineers had to build a collection of roads longer than the Alaska Highway and traverse even rougher terrain — all this, and lay 530 miles of oil pipeline as well.





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## Queen of the Yukon



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Today, the Alaska Highway is maintained by the Canadian, Yukon and Alaska governments. Some of the Canol pipeline road is still useable. It is maintained as a summer route by the Yukon Territory and serves tourists and geologists alike.

The part of the Canol Road still useable starts at Johnson's Crossing (Mile 836 of the Alaska Highway) and runs north to Ross River. It crosses the Pelly River by ferry, then on to the Mackenzie Mountains and the border between Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

Along its southern leg — between Johnson's Crossing and Ross River — the road takes you through some of the most breathtaking mountain scenery in Yukon. In the north — between Ross River and N.W.T. — it reaches right into the mountains and is rivalled only by the Dempster Highway. The Dempster is under construction north of Dawson and soon will take the motorist on an historic drive across the Arctic Circle and beyond to the Arctic Ocean.

Yukon has also played an important role in the history of aviation, particularly that of the famed northern bush pilot.

Because its rugged terrain made railway construction difficult, Yukon was an ideal place in which to introduce air travel. As early as 1927, the first commercial air venture was started in the north when Yukon Airways and Exploration Company Limited brought in the sister ship to the famous Spirit of St. Louis to open up air routes in the Territory.

Noted bush pilots like Wop May and Grant McConachie became household names in the north and their exploits legion. It was McConachie who started a small bushline operation — United Air Transport — in 1937 which eventually grew into C.P. Air, a major international airline serving five continents.

Today, Yukon's highways and airways provide the threads upon which the rich tapestry of the Territory's golden past is displayed. The romance and spell of one of the fabled areas of the world — yours for the travelling.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Yukon Territory is attempting to preserve the evidence of its colourful history for the benefit and enjoyment of all. Historic sites, burial grounds, old buildings and the articles therein are protected by legislation. Damaging historic sites or removal of items is subject to a fine of \$1,000 or six months in prison. Many of these sites are not marked and there are many cabins and other buildings which appear to be abandoned and useless. These are often used on a seasonal basis and are privately owned. Removal of items from these constitutes theft. When purchasing antiques or souvenir artifacts, it is wise to obtain a receipt.







## THE YUKON SYMBOL

The distinctive Yukon Symbol derives from the heroic climb of Klondikers on the Trail of '98 — the route of unbelievable hardships that took thousands of men to the beginnings of the greatest Gold Rush the world has ever known. It tells of Yukon's proud past, today's energy and the promise for the future.

Photography: Wayne Towriss, Department of Travel & Information, Government of Yukon Territory, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory

Historical Photographs Courtesy: McBride Museum, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Vancouver Centennial Museum, University of Washington, British Columbia Provincial Archives, Vancouver Maritime Museum

## CAMPGROUND FEES



To help pay for maintenance of our campgrounds, an annual fee of \$5.00 is charged. This entitles you to an attractive windshield sticker and camping privileges in all Yukon Government campgrounds. Windshield stickers are available from visitor information centres, selected commercial outlets, territorial agents or campground maintenance men. Happy camping.



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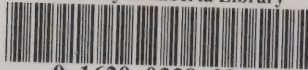
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Photography: Wayne Towriss, Department of Travel & Information, Yukon Territory, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory

Courtesy: McBride Museum, Whitehorse  
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